

## **Hensley Field: Statement of Significance**

(The initial 12.9.2021 draft was prepared by IES, and this updated 3.11.2022 draft incorporates revisions by MAS and the City of Dallas P+UD Department staff.)

### **Introduction**

Hensley Field is a 738-acre, military training and aviation complex located in the southwest corner of Dallas County bordering the City of Grand Prairie. The property is owned by the City of Dallas, since almost 100 years ago, and the City currently holds several leases on the site. The boundaries and naming of the Hensley Field property have changed through time by various uses and associations; however, for this preliminary Statement of Significance, Hensley Field is considered to be the site bounded by Jefferson Street to the north, the Dallas Naval Air Station (NAS) to the east, Mountain Creek Lake to the south and the original channel of Mountain Creek and the former Naval Weapons Industrial Reserve Plant (NWIRP) to the west (see Figure 1). These boundaries, which were historically determined by natural features, private property lines, and existing roadways, encompass the airfield and different military areas of operation while maintaining a distinct division between military and civilian areas. Hensley Field was a major cog in the former military engine at Mountain Creek Lake that totaled approximately 1,003 acres when it included the NWIRP complex located between the northwest corner of the airfield and 14th Street and the Dallas NAS located between Hensley Field Drive and Idlewood Road.

During Navy and TANG use of Hensley Field, a variety of studies and coordination efforts with the Texas Historical Commission (THC) were conducted for many of the resources present within Hensley Field. In 1995, several studies were performed for the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) cleanup plan of Dallas NAS, including a Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) Level I evaluation of 14 buildings and structures previously determined to be eligible for National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) listing by the THC in 1993. In addition to Dallas NAS resources, the THC determined that all buildings within the Texas Air National Guard Station (TANG) within the secured facility in the northeast corner of the property were not eligible for NRHP listing. This Statement of Significance was prepared using a combination of the 1995 BRAC report, 1995 HABS reports, THC comments, and observations of current conditions.

### **Hensley Field's Period of Significance**

The Period of Significance (1929 - 1961) covers three major phases in the development and operation at Hensley Field: the Interwar Period (1929 - 1939), the World War II Period (WWII; 1940-1945), and the early Cold War Period (1946 - 1961). Hensley Field was established by the Army Air Corps on former agricultural land within a rolling prairie setting in the Mountain Creek valley (see Figure 2). The Army Air Corps primarily used the field for training reservist pilots, servicing visiting Army planes and operating as a depot during the Interwar Period. The airfield importance was elevated during WWII when the Navy established the Dallas NAS as a permanent installation at Hensley Field, which transformed the airfield from a reserve station to a major base for primary and advance flight training (see Figures 3 and 4).

The Dallas NAS was constructed on property purchased by the Navy rather than leased by the City of Dallas, as was Hensley Field by the Army. Although a separate installation from Hensley Field, the Navy was granted access to the vital airfield for training cadets and officers. As the US escalated WWII efforts, the North American Aviation Plant (later the NWIRP) adjacent to Hensley Field was established in 1941 and produced aircraft for the Army. Planes rolling off the factory floor would taxi to runways at Hensley Field where they were tested and delivered to other air stations by Army pilots. After the war, Hensley Field reverted to a training center for reserve pilots, and the Navy assumed control of Hensley Field from the Army in 1949. The Navy also became the primary recipient of new aircraft from NWIRP and had the north-south runway extended to accommodate the new jet fighters from the nearby assembly plant (see Figure 5). The Army's facilities in the northeast corner of the airfield were transferred to the Texas Air National Guard (TANG). As the Cold War progressed and its role in the Korean War expanded, the TANG outgrew the aging Army facilities. The last major historic-period construction project at Hensley Field was the development of new facilities for the TANG in 1961, between the Dallas NAS base and former Army Air Corps installation (see Figure 6).

At the height of military operations at Hensley Field between 1939 and 1950, the airfield was considered to be one of the largest and most important military aviation installations in the country for reservist pilot training. Given the site's role in military aviation, including the education and flight training of pilots, as well as in assisting in the final stages of aircraft manufacturing, testing and delivery during the Period of Significance, Hensley Field is significant under National Register Evaluation Criterion "A" at the national and local levels. Hensley Field and the NWIRP gained national significance through their contributions to the war efforts during WWII and the Cold War through training programs and aircraft manufacturing. At the local level, the aviation base and the associated NWIRP helped shape Grand Prairie into a regional hub for weapons manufacturing and provided routine training for reservists residing in the area. The installation also significantly contributed to the local economy through job opportunities for civilians and local consumption of goods and services by stationed military personnel. In addition, resources within Hensley Field are significant under the Secretary of the Interior's Criterion "C" for design values and military building trends at the national and local levels of significance. Resources within Hensley Field are also significant under City of Dallas landmark designation for history, heritage and culture; historic context; and historic education.

### **A Designed Historic Landscape**

During a resource evaluation at Hensley Field, a "designed historic landscape" was identified that encompassed Hensley Field and the adjacent NWIRP and Dallas NAS complexes. This landscape was shaped by the missions of multiple military branches over the course of the Period of Significance. Elements of the preceding vernacular cultural landscape (including Fuget Cemetery, Faith Cottage orphanage house, Burgher farmstead, Bankhead Highway and the Texas & Pacific Railroad line) and the impoundment of Mountain Creek Lake by the Dallas Light and Power Company in 1938 were also influential to the design and operation of the airfield and the neighboring NWIRP. The most visually-distinct elements of this designed historic landscape are the runways and taxiways within Hensley Field and the sections of Mountain Creek Lake shoreline that were engineered for the expansion of the base.

Along the periphery of Hensley Field were the individual areas of operation for the Army Air Corps, the Dallas NAS and the TANG. Historically, each area of operation contained a large hangar, repair and maintenance shops, administrative buildings, housing, recreational areas, storage buildings and associated airfield structures. At a more detailed level, the networks of roads connected resources within and between the areas of operation and between each military branch area, providing further connectivity to the landscape. This is best illustrated with the landscape design of the Dallas NAS complex east of Hensley Field Drive through the cross-axis system of roads divided by a main avenue (Navy Drive) and an elliptic traffic circle around the administration building grounds. At the airfield's northwestern corner, the NWIRP complex was constructed in 1940 near the end of the northwest-southeast runway, which facilitated efficient testing and delivery of aircraft to the Army and Navy. Aesthetic landscaping, although minimal, was limited to areas adjacent to the higher-ranking officers, as seen adjacent to the Dallas NAS administrative building and the Army Air Corps officer's houses.

While alterations to Hensley Field occurred during the Period of Significance, these changes reflect the significant evolution of the airfield to accommodate changes in aircraft technology and the demands of the different military branches present at the base. For example, the runways were realigned and extended into Mountain Creek Lake multiple times as a result of the rapid advancement of aircraft technology over a 30-year period. Additionally, in the 1950s, most of the original buildings and structures associated with the original Army Air Corps installation were demolished to make way for the upgraded facilities that permanently established the National Guard at Hensley Field. However, the removal of buildings and structures designated as temporary, modern development - and/or the change in function for portions of the airfield - have diminished the integrity of the designed historic landscape at Hensley Field (see Figures 2 through 7). This significant loss of integrity is particularly pronounced in the eastern portion of airfield where many of the buildings and structures dating to the Period of Significance on Navy-owned property and in the footprint of the original Army campus were demolished or significantly altered to accommodate non-military use. In addition, the circulation pattern of roads, runways, taxiways, and aircraft storage have significantly changed during the Period of Significance as Hensley Field grew from a small Army Air Corps field to the massive post-Cold War facility present today, which has diminished the landscape's integrity.

Through the resources evaluation dating to the Period of Significance that are currently present within the Project boundaries (see Figure 7), the designed historic landscape was determined to have lost overall integrity of setting, materials, feeling and association. As such, the landscape is not eligible for listing on the NRHP. Hensley Field, however, may be eligible for a City of Dallas historic landmark designation under the criteria of history, heritage and culture; historic context; and historic education.

### **Potential Historic District Identified**

Within the Henley Field historic landscape, only one historic district has been identified that has retained significance and integrity. This district encompasses the two Army Air Corps commanding officer's houses constructed in 1932 or 1933 and its associated landscape of lagoons and beautified grounds. In 1993, the Texas Historical Commission (THC) determined the district was eligible for listing on the NRHP under

Criterion "A" as the last representation of Army presence at the airfield during the Interwar Period and WWII; and under Criterion "C" as an example of War Department residential design adapted for service. At that time, the THC also determined that another historic district - associated within the WWII Dallas NAS base and overlapping into and including portions of Hensley Field - was eligible for NRHP listing under Criteria "A" and "C". However, most of the contributing buildings were determined to be temporary structures and were subsequently demolished by the Navy in the early 2000s. Only the maintenance hangar, assembly and repair hangar, water tower, gatehouse, flagpole, landscape design associated with the former administration building, and the network of roads remain within this potential historic district.

## **Remaining Structures**

Of the hundreds of buildings and structures constructed within and surrounding Hensley Field during the Period of Significance, only 21 currently remain within the Hensley Field, NWIRP and Dallas NAS properties. Out of these resources, the two 1930s-era Army Air Corps officer houses, the Dallas NAS gatehouse, the TANG hangar built in 1961, and seven NWIRP buildings - known as Facilities 1, 6, 7, 16, 49, 94, and 97 in past resource evaluations and agency coordination documents - have achieved individual significance and have retained historical integrity. Of these remaining buildings, only eight are located within the Hensley Field property, and only three of these appear to have NRHP and/or City of Dallas landmark potential.

Like the historic district they contribute to, the two commanding officer houses have retained a high degree of historical integrity, and it is likely that both still individually-qualify for NRHP eligibility. The buildings are considered eligible under Criterion "A" as the only surviving buildings from the original air station and under Criterion "C" as good examples of the Spanish Colonial Revival variation of standard War Department design. The 1961 TANG hangar is significant under Criterion "A" for its role in wartime activities associated with the Cold War, and it is considered individually-eligible for NRHP listing under Criterion C as an example of industrial architecture and hangar construction. These buildings appear to be eligible for City of Dallas historic landmark designation under the criteria of history, heritage, and culture; architecture; and national and state recognition.

The Dallas NAS maintenance hangar was determined to be eligible for NRHP listing in 1993 under Criterion A for its association and role in the WWII mission of the Dallas NAS and under Criterion "C" as an example of modern wartime industrial architecture and hangar construction. However, after the Dallas NAS was decommissioned and subsequently closed in 1998, the hangar was adversely affected by demolition of the office wing, the removal and salvaging of materials and deterioration caused by weather-related events. Although the hangar has retained integrity of location and setting, the resource has lost its integrity of design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. As such, the Dallas NAS maintenance hangar is not considered eligible for NRHP listing. Due to the lack of architectural integrity, it does not appear that the building meets a minimum of three criteria required for City of Dallas landmark designation. The remaining resources within Hensley Field dating to the Period of Significance (TANG Supply building, Dallas NAS water tower, Dallas NAS Assembly and Repair Hangar, and small arms magazines) have not achieved individual significance nor contribute to a potential historic district.

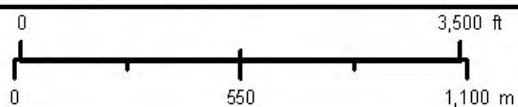
**Hensley Field: Statement of Significance  
Figures 1 - 7**

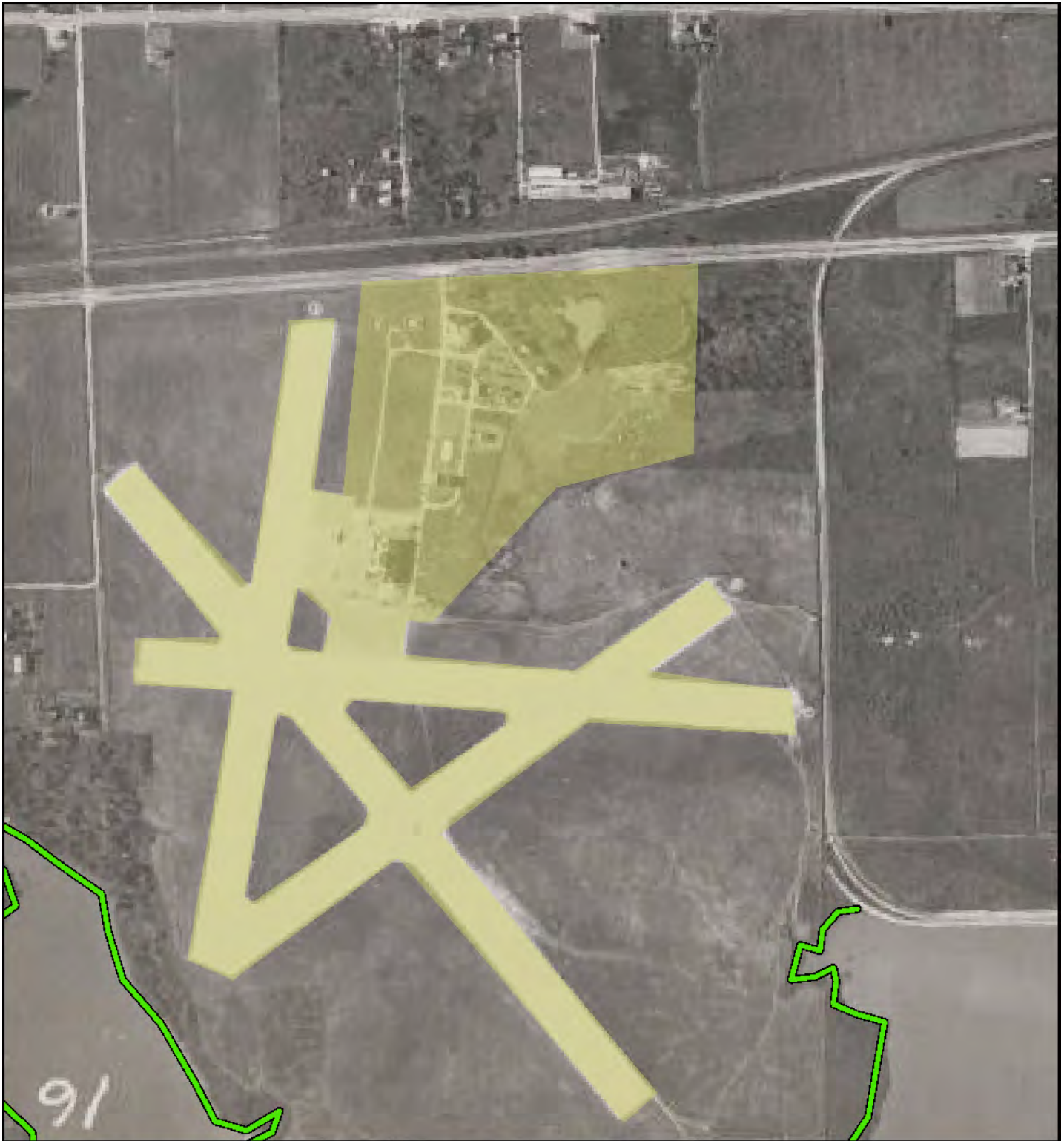


**Figure 1**  
**General Location Map**

 Project Boundary

County: Dallas  
 State: Texas  
 Date map created: 11/30/2021  
 Source: Streetmap; ESRI  
 IES Project Ref: 04.240.186

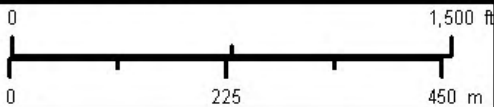




**Figure 2**  
**1940 Aerial Photograph**


- 1929-1940 Army Air Corps Construction
- 1938 Mountain Creek Lake Shoreline

County: Dallas  
 State: Texas  
 Date map created: 11/30/2021  
 Source: (c) 2009 Microsoft Corp, ESRI 10.8  
 IES Project Ref: 04.240.186

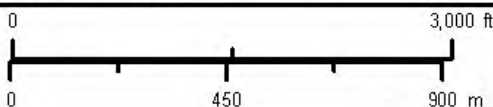




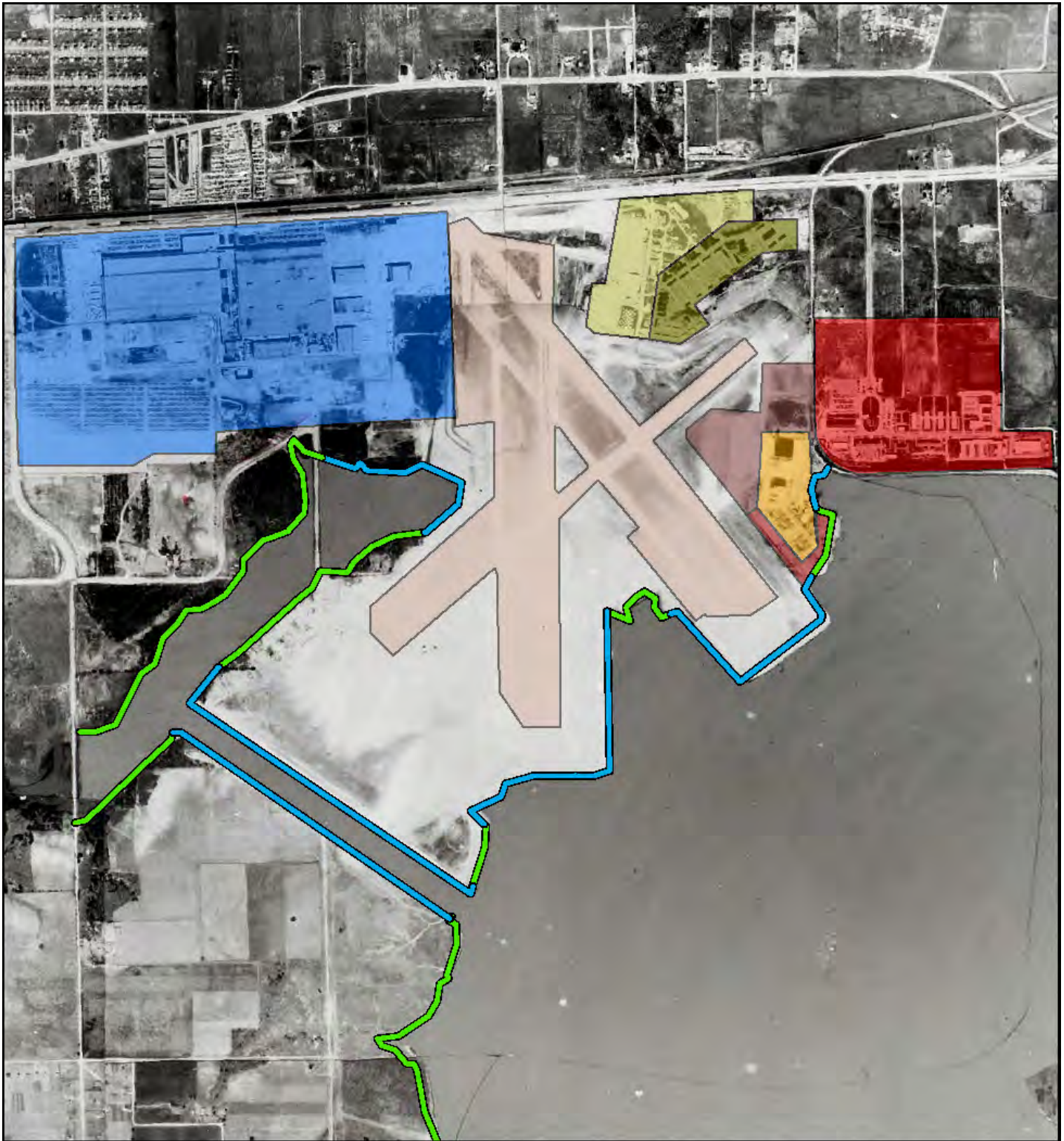
**Figure 3**  
**1942 Aerial Photograph**

-  1929-1940 Army Air Corps Construction
-  1941 Dallas Naval Reserve Aviation Base
-  North American Aviation Plant
-  1938 Mountain Creek Lake Shoreline

County: Dallas  
State: Texas  
Date map created: 11/30/2021  
Source: (c) 2009 Microsoft Corp, ESRI 10.8  
IES Project Ref: 04.240.186

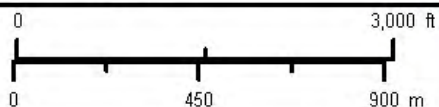




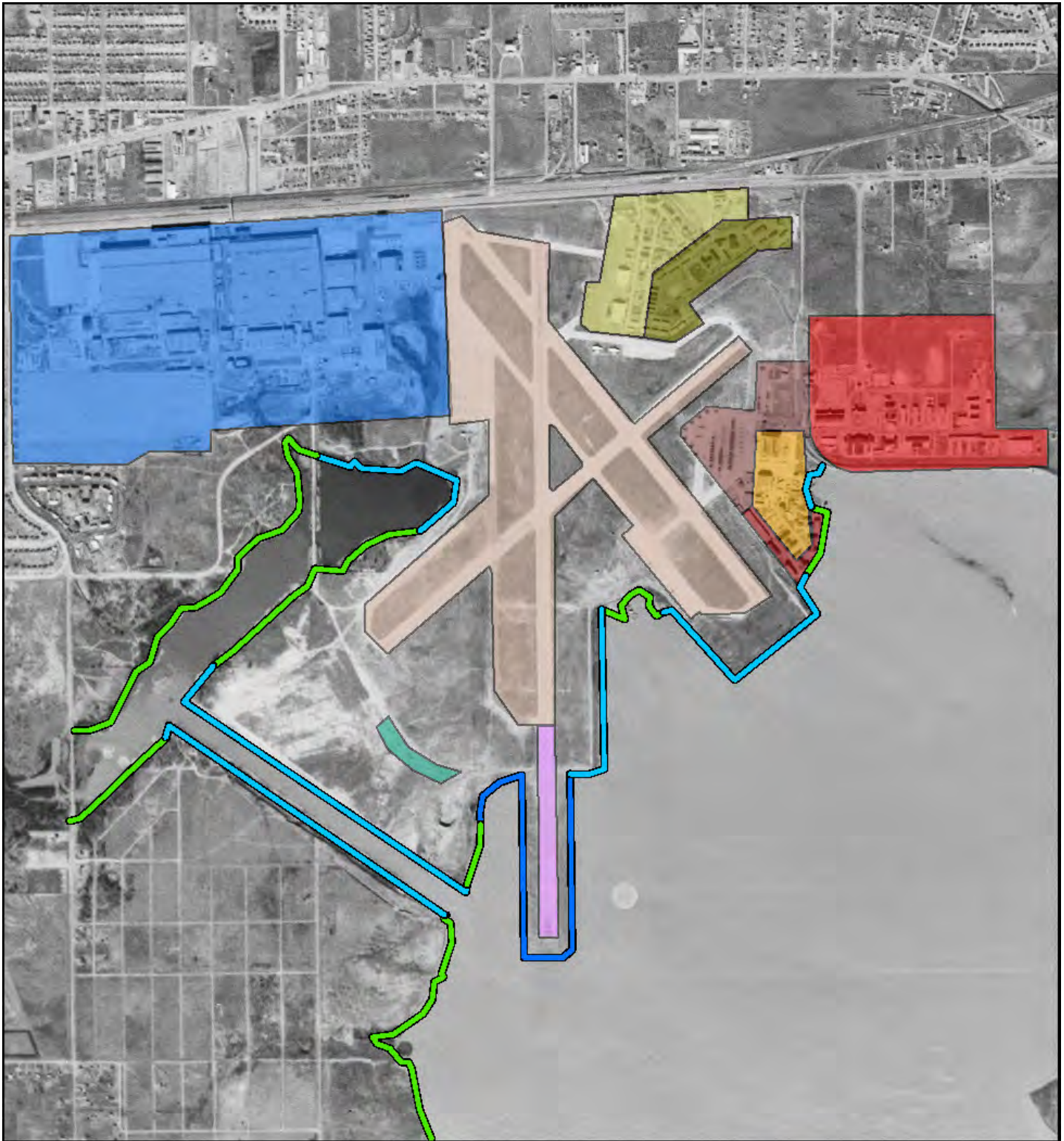


**Figure 4**  
**1945 Aerial Photograph**

County: Dallas  
 State: Texas  
 Date map created: 11/30/2021  
 Source: (c) 2009 Microsoft Corp; ESRI 10.8  
 IES Project Ref: 04.240.186

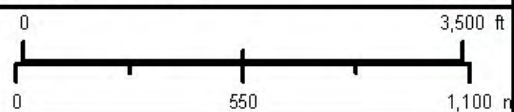


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|---|--------------------------------------|
|  1929-1940 Army Air Corps Construction | <b>Mountain Creek Lake Shoreline</b> |
|  1943-5 Army Air Corps Improvements    |                                      |
|  1941 Naval Reserve Aviation Base      |                                      |
|  1942-3 Dallas Naval Air Station       |                                      |
|  1945 Dallas Naval Air Station         |                                      |
|  1945 Runway Expansion and Realignment |                                      |
|  Dallas Naval Air Station Expansion    |                                      |
|  North American Aviation Plant         |                                      |
|  1938 Shoreline                      |                                      |
|  1945 Shoreline                      |                                      |

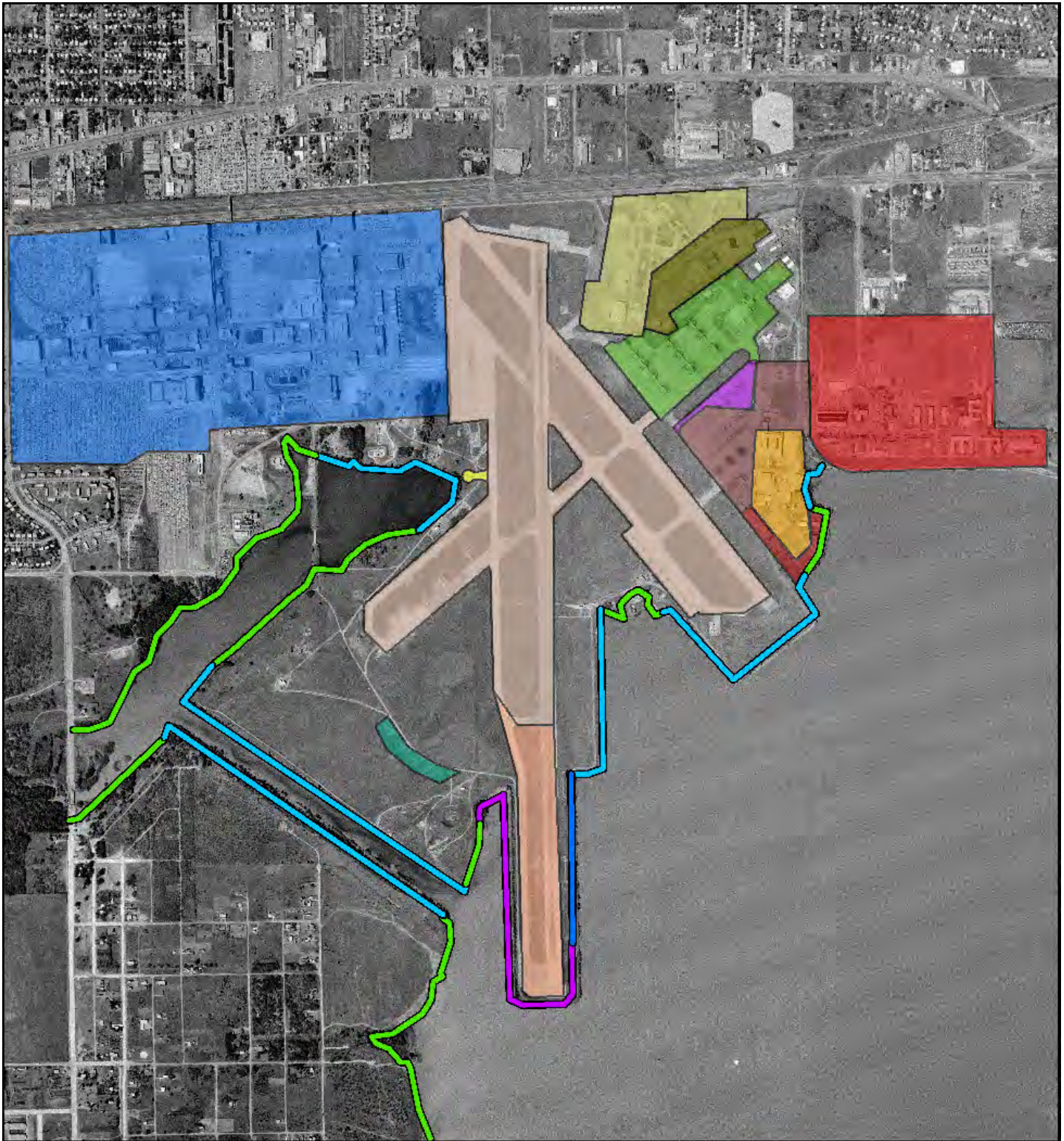


**Figure 5**  
**1953 Aerial Photograph**

County: Dallas  
 State: Texas  
 Date map created: 11/30/2021  
 Source: (c) 2009 Microsoft Corp; ESRI 10.8  
 IES Project Ref: 04.240.186

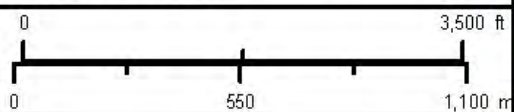


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|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1929-1940 Army Air Corps Construction | <b>Mountain Creek Lake Shoreline</b> |
| 1943-5 Army Air Corps Improvements    | 1938 Shoreline                       |
| 1941 Naval Reserve Aviation Base      | 1945 Shoreline                       |
| 1942-3 Dallas Naval Air Station       | 1950 Shoreline                       |
| 1945 Dallas Naval Air Station         |                                      |
| 1945 Runway Expansion and Realignment |                                      |
| 1950 Runway Expansion                 |                                      |
| 1952 Small Arms Magazines             |                                      |
| Dallas Naval Air Station Expansion    |                                      |
| Chance Vought Aircraft Corp. Plant    |                                      |



**Figure 6**  
**1968 Aerial Photograph**

County: Dallas  
 State: Texas  
 Date map created: 11/30/2021  
 Source: (c) 2009 Microsoft Corp; ESRI 10.8  
 IES Project Ref: 04.240.186



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|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1929-1940 Army Air Corps Construction | Dallas Naval Air Station Expansion   |
| 1945 Improvements                     | Ling-Temco-Vought Plant              |
| 1941 Naval Reserve Aviation Base      | <b>Mountain Creek Lake Shoreline</b> |
| 1942-3 Dallas Naval Air Station       | 1938 Shoreline                       |
| 1945 Dallas Naval Air Station         | 1945 Shoreline                       |
| 1945 Runway Expansion                 | 1950 Shoreline                       |
| 1952 Small Arms Magazines             | 1954 Shoreline                       |
| 1954 Runway Expansion                 |                                      |
| 1958 Recalibration Compass            |                                      |
| 1961 Apron Extension                  |                                      |
| 1961 Texas Air National Guard         |                                      |



**Figure 7**  
Resources Dating to  
the Period of Significance

County: Dallas  
State: Texas  
Date map created: 3/8/2022  
Source: (c) 2009 Microsoft Corp; ESRI 10.8  
IES Project Ref: 04.240.186



- Project Boundary
  - Contributing Buildings and Structures
  - Non-Contributing Buildings and Structures
- Construction Phases**
- 1929-1940 Army Air Corps
  - 1941 Naval Reserve Aviation Base
  - 1942-3 DNAS Expansion
  - 1945 DNAS Apron Expansion
  - 1945 Runway Expansion
  - 1952 Small Arms Magazines
  - 1954 Runway Expansion
  - 1958 Recalibration Compass
  - 1961 DNAS Apron Extension
  - 1961 Texas Air National Guard
  - Dallas NAS Expansion
  - NWRP